PILOT

Robert Brunswick Dieter

September 12, 1995

North Coast Vintage Aviation Society

Oral History
NCVAS - 4

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COMPLETE LIST OF AIRPLANES FLOWN BY R. B. DIETER

1. KittyHawk - Soloed - 1935
2. Waco 10 - OX5
3. KR-34 - J65 Wright
4. American Eaglet -Szekley
5. T Craft Tandem Trainer
6. T Craft 65
7. Aeronca Single Place
8. Aeronca Two Place - 2 Models
9. KR-21 - Two Place Taper Wing
10. SM8A Stinson
11. Straight Wing Waco J-5 Power
12. P. T. 19
13. B-24
14. A-24 (SBD)
15. A-26 Invader
16. Cessna - 165
17. B-18 Douglas
18. DC-3 Douglas
19. B-17G Flying Fortress
20. B-25 Mitchel Bomber
21. Fairchild 45
22. Curtis O52 (Observation)
23. PT17 Stearman
24. Stagger Beech (Fixed Gear) Jacobs Power
25. Stagger Beech (Retractable) P & W Power
26. Cessna T50 Twin
27. Cessna 310 Twin
28. Cessna 421 Twin
29. Howard Venura (PVI) Conversion
30. Lockeed Jetstar (Twin Engine Model)
31. N3N (Navy Trainer)
32. Fleet
33. Piper Cub
34. Piper Coupe
35. Piper Apache
36. Beech Bonanza
37. Beech Travel Air
38. Twin Bonanza
39. Beech Baron
40. Beech 18 - AT11, AT7
41. Howard D.G.A.
42. Globe Swift
43. Lockheed 10
44. Lockheed 12
45. Lockheed 18 (Lodestar)
46. Ercoupe
47. Cessna 195
48. Spartan Executive
49. Navion
50. Luscomb
51. Nordyne Norseman
52. Steve Whitman's Butter Cup
53. Rearwin Sportster
54. Grumman Widgeon
55. Grumman Goose
56. SR9 Stinson
57. BT13
58. L-5
59. Lear 24
60. Lear 25
61. Lear 35

PILOT

ROBERT BRUNSWICK DIETER

September 12, 1995

This is Tuesday, the 12th of September. We're up in McKinleyville. I'm talking with Bob Dieter from Tulsa, Oklahoma, and this is Mickey Strang. Also present and speaking will be Carl Fairfield [CF] and John Strang [JS]. Carl Fairfield is also videotaping this interview and the photographs referenced.

How did you get into aviation? What caused you to want to fly?

When Lindbergh went to Paris, I was 10 years old, and from that time on, there was nothing else that I ever wanted to do.

O. K., so how old were you when you . . . you said you soloed . . .

In '35.

1935. What did your parents have to say about your thoughts of. . . ?

I just had one parent. My father died when I was a year and a half old. My mother had no objections.

That's remarkable. Really.

Oh, I don't know. I had to be doing something. Even at 10 years old, I was thinking about what was I going to do when I got old enough to be on my own. I just. . . anybody that has done any flying at all will understand completely what I'm talking about. It's very addictive.

Provided you live long enough.

Well, you know, at the time when I was first learning to fly, I wouldn't have been at all surprised if I hadn't lived beyond 35 years old. Of course, I was 18 when I soloed and. . . . In fact, I soloed three years before I got my driver's license. We didn't have a car available. There was no way that I could even learn to drive. I used to walk to the airport or hook a ride with somebody.

You said that you had instructed CPT pilots. What was expected of, what sort of a background were you supposed to have to be such an instructor and what were you actually expected to teach them?

Well, they had a regular routine. They were all college students. They would assign a group to any one instructor. They usually set out a length of time where they start and finish - one semester or something like that. And they usually gave them, on the primary thing, they gave them 35 hours. That is, to teach them to fly, solo them and give them enough solo time where they ended up with 35 hours. Any licensed instructor could do that.

How much of that was government financed? How much of it were they expected to pick up?

They didn't pay any of that. The government paid it all.

That was with the thought that eventually they would become military pilots? Or what?

I think it was to give them a reservoir.

But you say any instructor . . . ?

Any licensed instructor. Now, the school itself had to qualify to get the contract. But any licensed instructor that could pass the requirements for an instructor's license, could do it.

When had you done that? Had you done instructing previously?

Yes. I got an instructor's license in . . . . See, I learned to fly in '35. In '36 I got a private license. In '37 I got a commercial license. At that time the government would take applications from people that wanted to get an instructor's certificate. I figured if they were going to pay for it, why should I pass it up? So I . . .

So the government actually helped with getting the instructor's license?

Yes, that's the only part. All the rest I financed myself by working for or paying whatever I could. I could have done it a lot faster if had had all the money, but it was $15 an hour, and, you know, in 1935, $15 was quite a little piece of money.

A week's pay.

Right.

You had been instructing then, actually, for a couple of years already.

Oh, yes. Sure.

Probably working out at the airport there? What sort of people wanted to learn to fly?

Well, I don't know. I don't think that. . . I never even stopped to think of whether or not they wanted to. They were in the program. They came out. . . they were assigned to me, so I went to work on them.

No, I mean, before you went to work for the CPT.

There were a lot of private citizens that would come out and learn to fly, and they didn't follow a regular routine. They would come out whenever they had the $15. You might have a guy once a week. You might give a guy a lesson now and six months later he'd come back for another one. Of course, that took a lot longer because you had to back up and find out how much he retained before you'd give him the next hour. That's where the CPT program worked out very nicely, because they had a regular routine that they went through in a time frame.

I can well imagine that, knowing some of the people that I knew that went into CPT that you probably did run into every conceivable type of accident-producer that . . .

Oh, yes. There was a funny incident happened later on when I was on the military program for Spartan. I had one student that had been through primary and advanced CPT. He had 65 or 70 hours. Of course, it was a cinch to solo him, and he went through most of the thing. We usually had various programs like spot landings, and aerobatics and things like that, and he went right through the thing. No problem at all with the exception when we got into aerobatics. On the CPT program, their requirement for spins was not necessarily accuracy. They wanted them to be able to get in and recognize one and get out. On the military program, they wanted him to start a spin here, do one-and-a-half turns and start his recovery. Well, this guy constantly overshot. I mean, he couldn't recognize where one-and-a-half turns was. And this was the point of the whole thing that he had to recognize that point. I started putting the pressure on him because, after all, he was way advanced over some of the other guys. Some of them had never seen the inside of an airplane to start with. And that's on the military program. And I kept pressuring him, and one day we were out there and it was lucky we were at 5,000 feet instead of 3,000 like we did a lot of the time. I was really hammering on him because I was getting disgusted with him because he just would not do it right. I was putting the pressure on him. Of course, we were in the front seat and they in the back and we had a mirror up here where you could watch him. He got pretty well wound up on it and I was making him do one after the other until I finally, I'd help him - in other words, I'd count for him for a couple of them and then have him do it, and he'd just keep right on going until I finally tell him, get this thing out! Finally, I just really got hacked at him, and I chewed him out real good and I said, you're going to stay here until you do this thing right! Well, he put it in a spin and, now, in that particular airplane, if you didn't make very positive moves, in other words, when you

moved the stick, it's hard back and full rudder one way or the other, depending on which way you want to spin. And when you come out of it, you go hard forward. You don't just do it this way, you go hard forward like that, because if you just ease up on it, instead of going like this, it starts going like that. I mean, it really winds up. And it's dangerous because it takes three or four turns to come out. He didn't make any move at all, and I sat there and I looked at him for a minute and he kept spinning and spinning, and I finally said, well, what are you going to do about this? And I finally realized he's sitting there like this, and his eyes are about that big, and he was just frozen. I mean, I felt the stick and it was like it was set in concrete. I pulled back in the seat and I got my knees in and I jammed it forward. I almost jacked him up out of the cockpit, you know, and he finally let go then and he started crying. I just took him back in. I told him there was no way that I could continue. He just couldn't seem to get beyond that one point. Well, he had already had, we normally gave them 65 hours and he was well up into between 45 and 50 hours on the program, and all the rest of his stuff was good. I mean, he could take that thing off and fly the pattern and do most of this other stuff without any problem at all. When I turned in a washout slip on him, the chief instructor said, you can't wash him out at this time! He's not, his other stuff is too good. I said, look, I'm not flying with that guy any more. He gets one shot at trying to kill me and if he doesn't make it, he's not going to get a second shot at me. I said, you go ahead and fly him. So he did, and he passed him and let him go on to basic. He lasted two weeks in basic and they threw him out. Well, I told him they were going to. He's the only student I ever passed, or that ever went through that I had anything to do with, that didn't go all the way through the program, because I set standards for them and, if they didn't come up, they got bounced. You couldn't really, you couldn't get emotionally involved with these kids because they varied so widely. I had one kid that was an old farm boy. Ugly son of a gun. Big old red-headed, buck-toothed kid, you know, and he looked like a guy who'd never been off the farm. I could show him one time, and he'd have it just like that. He went through that program just bang, bang, bang. But he was used to working with machinery and solving problems by himself, and things like that. And damned if he didn't get killed about two months after he got through the program on a ferry flight. He wasn't flying. He was a passenger. Crazy.

You said then, once you burned out on that and I can well understand burnout. . .

I got to the point where the minute I got in the airplane and the student took the thing and the first mistake he made I mean, I was mad from that time up. And I finally just told them, I can't do these guys any good any more. I'm going to have to get out of it.

About how many had you had by that time?

I'd run eight classes. And, see, when the program first started, we used to give them 60 hours in 12 weeks, and that was pretty well spread out. It wasn't like an easy program, but they kept tightening up. And then we would get two weeks off in between. We could do what we wanted to do. Well, pretty soon they cut it down to a week between classes, and added five hours to the program. And the next thing that we knew, there were two days between classes and they added a student. Instead of five, you got six. The last five hours were aerobatics. And, boy, I mean to tell you, it started getting tight. You never did have a chance to let up. I used to hear from some of these guys. I was up in Minneapolis one time, charter trip, at that time, this was in 1946 or '47, at that time you couldn't call up, well, you could call, but if you were on a trip, you usually went by the weather bureau to check the weather. And it was way up on the third floor, and here I was climbing up these stairs when I heard somebody running up the stairs behind me and I happened to look back. It was one of my old students. He had seen me walking across the ramp. He lived up there and he followed me up there and we had a great time talking about it.

From there you went into being the test pilot for Douglas.

Right, after the Army instruction time at Spartan, 1943.

What, exactly, did the test pilot. . . you know, I think that the standard vision of test pilot is somebody like Tony Levere who goes out. . . but the day-to-day work, what were you expected to do?

Well, we took green airplanes. Now, I say green airplanes, they'd never been flown before. They'd just come off the production line, and they were given to final inspection, and engine run-in. They would run the engine in and check everything in the system as far as that's concerned, and then at final inspection, they would inspect everything on the airplane. Then they would turn it over to the flight department. They would, on the B-24s, now, they would fly a pilot, a copilot and a flight engineer. And we would all go out to the airplane and run a complete inspection on the airplane ourselves. We didn't open up a lot and check the insides and all that. We checked, just a general inspection to make sure there was no obvious problem. And then we'd get in and run the engines, taxi out and take off. We'd fly two and a half hours and make five landings, and, if everything was all right, they would buy them. On the A-26s, it was a little different. We just had a pilot and a flight engineer who would go through the same type of routine, but our program was, when we were flying, we would time everything. We would time the gear retracting and extending, and how long it took props to feather or unfeather, and the time it took the flaps to come down or go back up and just to operate everything. We even

had part of the program with every, it seemed to me it was every 100ths or 200ths airplane, they had a gunnery range just about 150 miles up the country and we'd get a crew together with gunners for each station and we'd take them up there and shoot a whole load of ammunition. And on a B-24, it took us about two hours because, side gunners, we had to circle like this and side gunners could shoot down like that for the other one, and the top turret and the bottom turret and the tail turret and the nose turret and every one of them took a different operation, so it took a lot of time.

How well inspected were those aircraft by the time you. . . ?

It was amazing how well they came out. I think you heard me say that there were 18,000 people working on that stuff. The building was a mile long. And these airplanes, the original manufacturer on a lot of these were built by Ford. And the engines were built by Ford. And they were shipped into Tulsa and we assembled them there. But later on they started building them right there. Actually considering the fact that most of the people that were working on them just a couple of years before didn't even know what the inside of an airplane looked like, they did a terrific job.

You would have, say, one of these a day to do? Or one of these a week?

We would turn out approximately, I'm trying to think, average probably 24 or 26 a month. And if the first of the month was kind of slow, it got a little bit tight at the end of the month. Of course, Douglas got paid when the airplane was bought by the Army. Boy, they really were pushing on there. I mean, we'd just fly our tails off getting them done! Because if you had any kind of a squawk, they wouldn't buy the thing. You had to bring it back and correct the squawk and then fly it again. By the end of the month, you were really doing a lot of flying.

What was the usual thing on which you'd have a squawk? Was there any. . . ?

Trim. Trim, mostly. That was the most constant one. Either the throttles weren't trimmed up. You don't want them to roll. You don't want them like this, because it's too hard to control them. Oh, we'd have a little trouble with turbos once in a while. Turbos were running away. They'd have to change the control on it, or the prop would run away and you'd have to bring it back and put a new governor on the thing. It just, any number of things could go wrong. On the A-26s, we would, it was more fun than just plain work because you'd take that out and you would do all the obvious things like timing the gear and everything else, operating and checking out the thing, but then you'd dive it at 80% of the design speed and the design speed was something over 400 miles an hour and the airplane only cruised at a little over 300, we had a lot of fun doing that. I mean, you'd just do it like [whistles]. Make some fun out of it.

How many test pilots did they have?

Well, I've got a picture of the bunch that were there when I was. I think there's either 15 or 20 of them. And, of course, on the -24s, there were two pilots per airplane. On the -26, there was one, and a flight engineer. Of course, there was a flight engineer on the B-24 also, but we also had A-24s. Or, as Lee Whitehead would say, SBD. But these were modified for Air Force. And that was pure fun. It wasn't an exceptionally fast airplane, but it was very maneuverable and really a delight to fly. It used to be a lot of fun, all right. I about scared myself silly with them one day. I was over a little town about 40 miles south of Tulsa and I was flying at 16,000 feet and I decided I wanted to see how fast the thing would go, so I just left the power the way it was and did a split S like that. And I mean, I saw that airspeed go right out at the end of the dial and when I was getting ready to pull her off, it was like I had hold of the leg of that chair. I could not move it. I just had to trim a little bit and it came right out. The airplane had no restrictions on it as far as speed or maneuverability was concerned. The only thing they had, there was one restriction on the engine. They didn't want it to run over 2980 rpm, but the governor was taking care of that, so I didn't have that problem.

It sounds like a great way to earn your pay.

Oh, yes. I enjoyed it, but I was ashamed of myself that I wasn't in the military. They had no need for me when I got loose from the instructing business. When I first got in the instructing part of it, they were really short of instructors. They had these schools all over everywhere. We even had one guy instructing in our bunch that had a private license. Of course, he was flying military, so the FAA had nothing to do with it. In fact, he got killed in an accident. The last day on these programs after the students had already passed all their checks and everything, they had one more day to fly. We would take them out and they could, we'd tell them, you can do anything you want to do. And we'd swap seats with them, let them fly up where we were and we would just sit in the back. I can tell you, we went through some of the damnedest things. I had one guy that wanted to show me he could do a double outside snap in that PT-19, and that's an impossible maneuver in that airplane. I mean, I don't even know of one guy in the whole west that could do it, and I'm not one of them. I was hanging out of that airplane about that far and everything was outside and high. But this one that got killed, he had a student that wanted to do a double inside snap. Well, actually, when you do a snap roll, a snap roll is nothing but a horizontal spin, and the airplane is stalled. But he dove it down there and pulled it up like that and yanked that thing back and kicked the rudder and snapped like that and the right wing came off it. It folded back over the airplane and hit the instructor and killed him, and the airplane

went on down. The student got out. See, these were wood airplanes. They cut that stuff out. No more wild acrobatics.

What's an outside. . . ?

Outside is this way, and a snap, an inside snap, is this way. An outside snap is this way. It is a violent maneuver for the people involved. If you're not cinched down real tight, I mean, you come out of the seat about that far. And you're hanging on the belt. If the belt ever lets go, you're right out there in the open air. I had a brand new airplane assigned to me. I'd been flying one that was pretty war-weary; it had a lot of time on. But they assigned me a brand new airplane. On the primary, the very first part of any of the program, you flew only in the morning because it was all dual and you'd run your five or six guys out right in a hurry. And they were short enough in airplanes that when you finished your bunch, you'd only give them one lesson in one day, that's the way the deal was, you had to give the airplane over to the dispatcher and he'd let somebody else, one of the more advanced class instructors, use it as a solo airplane. Well, this kid goes out and he's practicing a spin. Well, to do a spin, you bring the airplane up. You'd cut the power back. You'd bring it up and slow it down, keep slowing it down, and keep pulling back on the stick until finally it stalls. When it does, you kick rudder, and it'll just fall right off in a spin. Well, this kid, he hurried it a little bit. He got it back up here and he got it almost, maybe this much more to come back on the stick and he just yanked it back like that. When he did, the airplane went up like this and fell over upside down, and he didn't have his belt fastened. He fell out. Of course, he had a parachute on and he just floated down. That airplane came from 5,000 feet just like that. It hit the ground just in a million pieces. I flew over that site the next day and I could see the outline of that airplane on the ground. It was crazy. Brand, spanking new airplane. First day on the job.

How much attention did the, well, I gather that since they couldn't sell their airplane until you guys had OK'd them, they probably listened to you very carefully.

Oh, yes. We had to make a report on everything. They were real strict about it. And we were. We knew what those airplanes were going to have to do, and we would not buy an airplane that was not within the limit.

Along that line, you've flown a humongous variety of aircraft across the years. What do you think was the most fun for you to fly?

There's one airplane, hands down. That's the Learjet. That was the most fun airplane I ever got hold of. And I had the luck to fly one of those, one model or the other of that, for 11 years. The last flight I made was on a Learjet. And I just loved every minute of it. I mean, every minute of it.

Why?

Why?

What made it the most fun?

Well, in the first place, it was a cinch to fly. It was fast and agile. It would do anything you wanted to do. And I mean, with a vengeance. The normal rate of climb, the initial rate of climb on those things was 7,000 feet a minute. I mean, you just, from the runway, see, you had 5,000 feet of runway here. By the time you got about 2/3 down, you rotated that airplane and started to climb, you were climbing at 220 knots. That's 7,000 feet a minute. I mean, you could take off and you could just climb right up like that. They were great.

What do you think was the safest aircraft you ever flew?

I think that airplane was. You could lose an engine on that airplane and the passengers would never know it.

Boy, now that says something!

The first time I ever had to shut one down, I was coming in from Houston one night. We were relatively close to the airport, and we lost a fuel pump on one engine. We just shut it down. We didn't say anything to anybody. We just went in and landed, packed it up and shut it down and the passengers left. Then we went to see what was wrong with the engine. They never heard that the engine had shut down. And when I was training on the thing, when we were checking out on this thing, we went to. . . . United Airlines had a school on this airplane. When we first bought one, I went through this school. It was part of the purchase price of the airplane. It was a pretty comprehensive deal. The only thing was, we had a guy that was straight out of the Air Force, which was our instructor. He had never flown any civilian flying except with the airline, and that was all. We taught him more than he taught us. He knew nothing about how we operated. He was strictly, everything was regimented, whereas our type of flying, on a good day you could do anything you wanted to do. You were held within limits as far as altitude. Anything over 18,000 feet had to be regulated. Anything under that was fine. Just a lot of little things. We were taxiing out one day and they were giving two-hour delays for I. F. R. departures. They weren't going to release any airplane on an instrument flight plan for two hours. Well, there was no point in us waiting around for two hours. And this guy says, well, I guess we'd better cancel and go back in and I said, no way! We'll cancel and go VFR and catch something in the air. And we did, and we didn't have any delay at all. We got the whole program in. No problem. We went right on through.

What do you think, from the standpoint, you've been in the business end of the business, also from the business end of the business, what do you think the best aircraft is?

Well, it all depends on what you have to do with it. In other words, if you've got a lot of people to move, you'd better get a pretty good-sized airplane. I've flown people - I almost went to work for Aerojet General when I started with this last company I was with because a fellow that I'd learned to fly with was their chief pilot. He had a possibility. He was moving a lot of people. I mean, moving them, more or less, on the same scheme that an airline would. In other words, they were issued tickets and they checked in at a certain time and the airplane left with so many people and you went to a certain place. He was going to buy - this was before the jets were getting popular. Those first jets were pretty rich. Expensive. The first one we bought was three years old and it had 600 hours on the thing, and it cost us $600,000. The next one cost a million and a quarter. And the third one cost two and a half. So, I mean, you've got to need one pretty bad. They cost roughly a million dollars a year to operate them. And that's a small airplane. We could carry seven passengers. But you take somebody that needs to move 15 or 20 or 30 or 40 people in a day, and a lot of them in different directions, and you've got to have two airplanes because an airplane can only go one direction at the same time. But this guy had a, he was having to move about 60-some people a day. They had a job out in the desert somewhere, and - this was in the 1950s - early '50s at Aerojet General - and they were going to buy two Constellations, the tri-tail job that TWA. . .

A very graceful aircraft, yes. Beautiful airplane.

But he was going to buy two of them and they were going to run two of them every day. In other words, one would go out and drop the first bunch and it would take the bunch that was there and bring them back. In the meantime, the second one would go out and get the second bunch and so forth. In other words, they were crossing. They would make two trips a day like that. The deal didn't jell. Either they were getting pretty well along on the contract, or something happened. I don't really know.

Aerojet had periodic financial problems and it finally sort of went belly up.

Yes. Quite a bit later, though.

Yes.

This friend of mine stayed with them until he retired. I still keep in touch with him. He's a real good friend.

I think you've already answered my next question, which is, what aircraft did you like best and why? I think you've already given me that one.

Yes, no question in my mind at all.

Let me ask you something along a more personal line. What personal qualities, what qualifications, what background, what training, what do you think stood you in the best stead during your flying career? What do you think helped make you one of the "old" pilots?

Well, not doing anything stupid if you could help it, that was one thing. I don't know. You've got a certain amount of luck involved because you can have things happen. . . at one time during a flight it's a minor inconvenience. You can have the same thing happen at a different time in the flight, and it will kill you. I may have been a little bit wild about it, but that's one thing about the jets. They're so much easier. For one thing, they have a lot more equipment, a lot of automatic stuff that helps you do the job. But I'll give you a little example. I hadn't been with the Bovaird company for very long. See, I ended up, the last people I worked for was Bovaird Company. It was 21 years. When I started with them, we were flying a Twin Beech. We carried six or seven passengers, and we cruised about 200 miles an hour and it had about a five-hour range, but I was flying alone. No copilot in that. And it wasn't that you particularly needed a copilot, it's just the idea that for the safety of it, you should have another pilot on the airplane. I tried to convince them of that when we started, but they didn't understand what the deal was all about, and they wanted me to start by myself. It was all right. I'd already flown 10,000 hours in the things by myself, so there was nothing new. I was bringing one of the vice presidents back one time from Midland to Tulsa, and we, of course, this was well equipped for a Twin Beech. We had radar and all this stuff, you know, autopilot. We were just sailing along there. Pretty soon we came upon a widely dispersed squall line. Thunderstorms hanging here and there and everywhere. We were looking at them in the radar. I was looking for soft spots where I could break through the thing and we were probably at 8,000 feet or so. This guy was a semi-white-knuckle rider. He was a worry bird. He was sitting up there in front with me and we were just chatting about it and he begins to see those thunderstorms. Of course, I'd been looking at them for 100 miles anyway. He said, what are you going to do? I said, well, we're just looking for a soft spot. We'll get through here pretty quick. And he didn't say anything for quite some time. Pretty soon he says, Bob, suppose something happens to you. What's going to happen to me? I said, well, do you really want me to tell you? Or do you want me to tell you something I think you want to hear? He said, no, no. I want to know the truth. I said, that's easy. You'll get killed. God, he says, we can't have that kind of a situation! I said, well. . . . He said, isn't there some way that you could give me a little training to where I could get this thing down? I said, there isn't a Chinaman's chance that you could get this airplane on the ground in one piece. It wasn't a difficult airplane to fly,

but it required training. And the boss said the same thing. You've got a lot of hours. Can't you teach me how to do it? I said, you've got to find the airport, to start with. You've got to know how to operate the autopilot. You have to know what to do with the airplane. And I said, it's just an impossible situation. Well, what do you suggest? I said, well, get a copilot. So we did. And we did from then on. The first thing the boss said, what are you trying to do? Scare old Vic out of his skin? I said, no, he asked me a question and I answered him truthfully.

How many hours total have you got?

Right at 22,000.

You've got a guardian angel sitting on both shoulders, haven't you?

Well, really, I didn't really have too many real bad situations happen. A lot of these situations that happen, they are induced. I've always been very serious about my flying. I always kept myself up even with the thing. I used to go get retraining, even though I really didn't think I needed it in a lot of cases, but to satisfy everybody, I did.

A lot of the accidents happen because somebody didn't check all the squares.

That's right. We used to be very religious about using that checklist and everything. And a lot of times accidents happen because somebody didn't do something when they were supposed to.

Did you ever fly a helicopter?

No, and that's only half of it. A good friend of mine got killed in one about a month ago.

Yes. They're a whale of a lot of fun, but not one of the world's safer aircraft operations.

I'm not about to get into a helicopter. You know what they call the nut that they hold the rotor on with?

The pilot?

Yes, do you know what he calls it? A Jesus nut. That's a very common thing among helicopter pilots.

Yes, I have heard that because I used to fly, whenever I could talk my way into it, with the SAR team at China Lake, the SAR helo. That is, as long as I knew and trusted the chief pilot. I did not get in an aircraft with anybody that I didn't know and trust.

This friend of mine that got killed just about a month ago was the chief safety officer, but they were chasing a drug dealer. He was growing marijuana and they had suspected him. They'd been checking him for quite some time, and they had two helicopters and they came up on him. They were out in the field and he was pulling up

these things and throwing them over his shoulders and then taking them in and processing them. He finally figured out that these helicopters were watching him. Well, he started running, jumped in a Jeep and drove off right quick, and they started to chase him. This guy got a little bit too anxious and he ran into a guy wire of a high line - there was a big high line running across there - and it just cut the shaft right off of that thing and it just fell like a rock.

They tend to if anything happens.

There's nothing to hold them up.

What advice would you give to anybody who's contemplating going into flying?

Well, I would say that the biggest thing is to get the best training you can get, and take it seriously. I mean, it's a lot of fun, but it's also serious.

Any particular background that you think would be especially good?

I'd say just a good training school. It doesn't seem to matter a fellow's education, because I've seen, like I said that that country boy was one of the best students I ever had. I mean, the quickest learner, and I had. . . .

It's a matter of personal qualifications rather than. . .?

Right. That's what you were born with. I had some, some of my classes, two or three of them, were all student officers, West Pointers and that type. I had one guy that was a graduate lawyer. He was a Captain. He had all kinds of degrees. Real nice guy, just the nicest guy you'd want to ever meet. I couldn't solo him. He couldn't find the airport. Once, I could talk to him and tell him, no, you turn here and go to such an altitude and you turn here, and there's the airport there and keep it in mind and we'll turn down here in a base leg and land. As long as I told him every turn and everything, he was fine. But then I'd shut up and he'd take off and he'd climb to 300 feet and make a turn, and just fly. And I'd let him go 10, 15 minutes and he's just sitting there looking around. Well, I'd chew him out and get him back in there and get him in the pattern and show him where the airport was and he could not make the pattern and enter right and make the pattern and land. He just couldn't seem to get it through his head. And I had to wash him out. There was the absolute opposite from this other kid that I was telling you about. He was a young guy about 24, 25 years old. And, like I say, a real nice guy.

What do you think, well, if you liked the Learjet, obviously, you think aviation is going in the right direction.

Well, actually, the FAA has taken an awful lot of the fun out of flying. It's strictly a business now. And Lear is improving their airplanes. They're coming out with newer models, carrying more people in higher altitudes and more equipment and all that. Of

course, the price has gone up. They're up to nine or 10 million bucks. And they're, I really can't see a real big future for business aviation except for the large companies, because it's getting too expensive. But there's Bombardier in Canada. They own Learjet now. They're building some larger airplanes than the Lear that probably run $30 million apiece, carry 40 or 50 people on them. But how many companies need to move 50 people at a time? They were talking about building a supersonic business airplane that would carry 10 people, fly halfway across the world in one shot. It would cruise probably at Mach 3. Fifty million dollars apiece. How many companies do you know about that can handle that?
I may be wrong, but. . .

No, it makes very good sense because you could charter an aircraft . . . .

How many people can afford to pay $50 million and hunt people that are going to charter the airplane? The airplane's going to cost a bunch per hour. That's one that I was telling you about is horrible. Forty, 50 people, you've got almost a feeder line. That thing probably would cost $15,000 an hour to operate.
[*pause*]

We came out of one of the airports out of here, I'm trying to remember which airport it was. It was north of LAX. Burbank! We came out of Burbank and it was at night and we had some new equipment. Now, this is some years ago. This equipment was pretty new, in fact, that piece of equipment, alone costs $55,000 plus installation, and the airlines were not using them yet at that time. Even American. We took off from there and we filed for direct and as soon as we got above 24,000 feet, then we were cleared direct. Well, we were climbing out and I heard the center calling and said, our number was Six Two Bravo, and he said, Six Two Bravo, what's your heading? And I said zero six seven degrees. He called over to American who was just taking off behind us and he said, American, you want a direct Tulsa? And they said, you bet! They said, then steer zero six seven. They followed us all the way in.

I guess my last question is, is there anything that you'd like to get on the record that you haven't been saying? Do you have any second thoughts about anything?

Not really. I don't care what a guy's doing. As he gets older, he's got to face the fact that somewhere along the line he's got to quit. The only reason I quit was because I had a triple bypass, and, of course, that puts you on the ground that quick. It took a little doing to acclimate myself to the fact that I couldn't fly.

How did you decompress?

It really wasn't all that bad. I mean, I had days when I'd be sitting there watching these guys making these jet trails, and I'd say, damn! I wish I was up there doing that!

But, really, I don't have any regrets. I had a good, fine career. I flew actively for 46 years. I had a lot of fun, and I made a good living and I enjoyed it.

That's more than a lot of people can say.

Well, I loved every minute of it. I mean, I worked like hell a lot of times. We had one period even in the jets, 21 days in a row, where we would start in the morning at 7 o'clock. We were lucky to get back in at 12 or 1 o'clock in the morning and go again the next morning at 7. All over everywhere. For 21 days! That is a pretty tough row, but even that was nice.

Most of your flying was within this country rather than overseas flights?

No, we didn't do overseas. It wasn't economically feasible. See, we would fly them to New York and they'd jump on somebody going across. Overseas flying is very complicated. You have to get, to do it practically, you have to get some of these companies to manage these things for you, and they manage the whole flight and then give you the paperwork and you just pass it out as you go. But it's also very expensive. And it's getting more so all the time. Now, there's a lot of companies that do it.

[CF] When you were flying for Bovaird, did they do some political favors for the high-faluting politicians every once in a while?

Well, we had, one time, it wasn't too long after I went to work for them, we were still flying the Twin Beech, and we had a guy that was running for governor of Oklahoma. I flew him around a fair amount, not a whole lot, but a few trips, and he was a nice guy. I was glad to help him out, but he didn't make it.

[CF] O. K. What about Kissinger?

Oh, that son. . . .

This sounds intriguing! What about Kissinger?

You've heard of Kissinger.

We have a daughter who spent 20 years with the State Department. You mention Kissinger's name and she goes ballistic.

I understand exactly what she's talking about. We went from here to New York, dead-headed up. All we had was the boss on board. He wanted to meet Kissinger and Kissinger was coming to Tulsa to give some kind of speech. Well, we sat on LaGuardia Airport for over two hours waiting for him, and he finally showed up. Ninety-mine percent of the people that we pick up - and we don't expect them to be bowing down to us or anything like that - but we expect them to treat us like a human being. Kissinger never so much as looked our way. He didn't ask to meet us or anything, and we didn't say a thing, but we were standing right there when he got there. They got on the airplane and we flew

to Tulsa and the first thing when they got off, one of reporters said, Mr. Kissinger, you were due here two hours ago. What happened? Oh, the pilots got lost. I could have cold-cocked that sucker! I mean to tell you. Man, it took everything I could muster not to spout at that.

Not to say anything, yes.

I formed my firm opinion of him at that time. And the worst was, that got in the paper. Well, the boss knew different, but he never said a word.

Well, the boss was the one that paid your pay check.

I've always said, the boss may not always be right, but he's always the boss.

He's the one that signs your efficiency report and it is judicious to pay attention to what he says as a result thereof. It's something you learn while working for the military, especially in the public affairs arena.

Especially in the military. Because they've got a lot of those petty guys that have got to be boss, no matter if they don't even know what day it is.

If they have a star or two on their shoulders. . .

It even gets worse, I'll bet.

It's a funny thing. They seem to run to two extremes. They're either hellishly nice or the exact opposite thereof, and there seem to be relatively few at flag rank that fall in between the two extremes.

I've found that, over the years, we have hauled a lot of, not outrageously famous people, but a lot of important people. Heads of companies and governors, senators, all types of people like that, and, almost without exception, they have been very nice. But Kissinger . . . boy, he is something else! I had one guy that was CEO of a large company. He was riding with us and he had been in other types of jets but he had never been in a Lear. A Lear has very high performance compared to most of the other stuff. He was kind of squatting down between us as we were flying along, you know. See, that thing used to fly at 41 or 45,000, and even the late ones, 51,000. I mean, the weather was down here. You didn't worry about it. But he was asking a lot of questions about it and chatting back and forth, and pretty soon he pulled out a big old cigar about that long. He held it up like that and he says, you don't mind if I smoke, do you? And I said, not if you don't mind if I get sick. He kind of laughed and stuck it back in his pocket. He was a real nice guy about it. He never said a word. He stayed and chewed the fat for another five minutes, then he went back and sat down. And almost without exception these guys, when you get where you're going, they'll get out and they'll shake hands with you and thank you for a nice trip

before they take off, but not Kissinger. And that is not the reason that I'm particularly hacked at him, but he's just a horse's rear end in my book.

I've got some pictures to show here of these guys that I'm talking about.

We bought five of these airplanes. They were identical and they were all brand new. This one, 5014, you know, we had 14, 15, 16, 17. One seven was the last one we bought, and 17 is the one that the Experimental Aircraft Association has now. The very airplane. This is me flying, right here.

What were you flying over Tulsa?

Yes, that was over Tulsa. Here's a nice shot.

I like that.

Well, we did high altitude photography with this thing at 36,000 feet. And this was the crew that we used, with the exception that this is not the copilot. Our copilot was. . . . This is one of my partners. The other partner . . . .

Was this part of the Air Force mapping program? Were you contracted to the Air Force mapping program, aerial mapping?

Not Air Force. This is before they got into it. This was National Coast and Geodetic. This was shot in the hangar where we were. This is all the same airplane. This was the first one that we bought. We kind of got blasé with the others later on. We didn't pay any attention to these.

This was one of the students. In fact, this was that country boy right there.

The one that turned out to be such a terrifically quick learner?

Great. Great student. He got killed, of course, quicker than any of them.

These are of an just old airplane that's been restored.

This guy is from Massachusetts. I had relatives back east and he had contacted me through this other partner of mine, the one that is in the DC-3, the other partner. This is many years later. This was in 1990. This was taken in 1947. Anyway, this guy ended up as regional chief pilot on 737s for United Airlines, and later was flying 747s. In fact, he . . . another friend of mine in Tulsa by the name of Dale Frakes, he flew for, or, rather, was operating, more or less, an operating manager for a 727 that this guy owned by himself. He's multimillionaire in Tulsa, but he has business all over the world. When he got this 727, he bought it from some airline and ran it through the American refurbishing program, and it was a beautiful airplane. Anyway, they were in Hong Kong one time and they were parked on the ramp, waiting for them to get through with their business. In fact, they used to, when they flew foreign, they would just live on the airplane instead of going to a hotel.

It also adds security to your airplane.

Oh, yes, yes. Anyway, they were parked there, and, in fact, they were waiting for the passengers to show up, and they're standing by the airplane and this 747 landed, and taxied up and parked right alongside of them because they had an American flag on it and this one did, too. It was a United Airlines airplane. The crew got out and they walked over to this 727 and introduced themselves and, where are you from? He said, Tulsa. And the pilot on this thing said, do you know Bob Dieter? He says, he was an old partner of mine. I hadn't seen him for years, but we corresponded once in a while. But he was a nice kid. He was only 18 years old then. He knew this guy, a friend of his, and this guy was a fanatic on B-17s. On one of my trips back east, I brought all of the stuff that I had on -17s, and he was taking history on the particular airplane that we used to own. This was where he wrote from. He hadn't sent the pictures back right away.

This is an A-26 that we . . . . Here's how the airplane looks today.

[CF] That's the Experimental, EAA -17?

Yes.

This is a couple of Captains, students of mine. Both of them real nice guys.

[CF] What was that plane?

The PT-19.

[CF] O. K.

Here's another group. These are the two guys that were my partners. Both of them are dead now.

The quick way? Or. . . ?

No, well, this guy here, he really wasn't a pilot. The chubby guy. But he thought he was. And it caught up with him one day, and settled it for him. The other guy died of cancer.

The other way is better.

Yes. That's what I hope and pray. I'm not at all worried about checking out. I just want to do it quick.

There's another picture of the A-26 that we . . . . That was the first one in the country that was modified.

This is what's left of an airplane after a tornado got to it.

[CF] That's the best kind of a crash. Nobody in it.

That's right.

This is in 1947.

[CF] Is that a Twin Beech? Or what is that?

It's a Twin Cessna 50. These are four of the instructors that were on the program.

You didn't have to wear any sort of a uniform or anything?

Well, it was taken off duty there. We had to wear a uniform. And the cadets had to treat us like an officer. I mean, they came up, they lined up, and they all saluted. We had to salute them back and so forth. They'd call you "sir" and, I mean, they didn't get away with anything. This was their rules, not ours.

There's a picture of the hangar that we had when we were operating that B-17. We leased the north half, which was 300 by 300.

That's a gorgeous hangar.

Yes. It was 600 feet long, 300 feet wide.

[CF] Is that building still out there in Tulsa?

Yes.

[CF] What are they doing with it now?

Well, the Air Force is going to turn it over to the city, and they are going to get them, they want large spaces, and they'll break it up into various spaces. But they've got to do a lot of rewiring and building walls and stuff like that. And they're waiting until they get these contracts signed and how much exact space do these people need. And they'll have to cut in doors and the sides and so forth. It's a big property. That building is a mile long.

[CF] Not very many mile long buildings in the world.

No, well, they don't want them. . . Ft. Worth, that's the old Consolidated plant down there and they built it six feet longer so they could be the longest. Typical Texas.

When we sold this airplane to the Williams Company, they wanted me to fly it because there weren't too many already in the business that were qualified on that airplane, but we had this business going and I couldn't do it. This guy here, by the name of Jim Crawford, he flew with me at Douglas, so I knew he was familiar with this airplane. Good pilot. Nice guy. And this guy here, Jim Romine, they flew together for a fair amount of time, but the guy that did the most flying in that company, the executive, had a dream one night that he saw this airplane crash and he was in it. He wouldn't get in it again, so they had to sell it. As these deals go, this was not the fanciest one in the world, but it was the first. Really, the passengers didn't get a very good deal on this type of airplane as far as an executive airplane. The Ventura was a much better airplane for that because it had a lot more room. We had great big easy chairs in it, you know.

[CF] Do you have your 12-engine airplane there?

Yes, it's got to be here somewhere.

[CF] There's this 12-engine airplane. He's got a picture of one. Bob didn't fly it.

No, I was . . . in fact, I hadn't even flown yet.

This is me in 1947. This is me in 1995. Let's see, that's in that thing.

[CF] I've got some questions about the Santo Domingo episode, too. I'm dying to know if you think it was the CIA flying.

I have no idea. I was so glad to get out of that thing and forget all about it. There's this FBI guy that followed me around for another three years. I got really familiar with him.

[CF] I'd guess so!

Have you ever seen that before?

Yes, I have seen a picture of it. . .

[JS] A DOX!

Yes, that was in New York. All the engines were off. They flew it across the Atlantic. They said they never even got to 1,000 feet at any time. I don't think the airplane would go above that. It had 12 engines on it. Four-bladed, fixed-pitch props. It was all they could do to get it off the ground, or off the water. They had to run them so hard all the way across that they had to overhaul them when they got here.

[CF] An almost flying boat. Well, they should park it right next to the Spruce Goose.

It should have been a good airplane.

It may have been an inspiration for the Spruce Goose. Hughes had a tendency to know what he was doing.

Hughes was a good pilot.

[CF] Did you meet him?

Well, I didn't really meet him. I was, in fact, these pictures of the A-26 in front of the old terminal, we had to go over there to get gas. They wouldn't let us have gas in that hangar over there. We had to taxi across to get fuel. We were getting that airplane fueled. It was during this time that he was being questioned about the Spruce Goose by Congress. He came through in his B-23, he had one converted, and he stopped for fuel. I walked in to arrange for the gas and here was this guy pacing up and down in the terminal. It was late. There wasn't anybody around. I recognized him right off the bat. I didn't say anything because he was miles away. I mean, his mind you could see was already in Washington fighting with those guys. He was a nice-looking guy, and really, really sharp.

[CF] That was the rumor among pilots that the Spruce Goose was flyable and. . .

Oh, he actually flew it.

It broke water.

Oh, yes, he flew it about a mile.

It was illegally, but. . .

Well, he said it was an accident, but it wasn't. It was about as much an accident as. . . what's that guy that flew to Ireland?

Corrigan. "Oh, gee! I was going the wrong direction!"

And he really was a screw-up! I kind of halfway believed that he didn't know that he was going that way. He worked for Douglas a little bit during the war while I was with

Douglas, but he was working for them out in Santa Monica. They had an airplane, a DC-3, that used to make a trip east. The early part of the week it would go from Santa Monica to Oklahoma City. They would fly up there, and then Tulsa and then to Chicago. They were flying on from there in DC-4s. And then there'd be Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. Thursday they'd come back to Tulsa. Friday to Oklahoma City, and then on Saturday they'd go back to California. And he was on that when it came in one day and he wanted to fly the A-24. They had some on the line that were ready to go, so they assigned him an airplane, and he went out there and got in an airplane and flew the thing out and came back. Come to find out, it was the wrong airplane.

[CF] Continuing the tradition!

It was the wrong airplane. It hadn't even been green-run or anything else. He got away with it, but, I mean. . . . He was a funny-looking little guy. He had red hair and it kind of stuck up straight. Typical Irishman. Nice guy. He wore brown shoes and they were all scuffed up, looked like he'd done sandpaper all over them, you know. But we liked him. We had a lot of fun talking to him.

Probably he was one of those people who started a half a step out of sync and just isn't quite sure where he is but that's O.K.

Well, he was a nice guy and he was lucky.

[CF] What are your thoughts about Amelia Earhart. I hear she wasn't much of a pilot.

Well, no, she did a pretty fair job. She wasn't the most expert pilot that ever got in an airplane.

Noonan wasn't all that good of a navigator either, was he?

Well, the guy. . . .Are you talking about Noonan?

Yes.

He was a drunk, so I heard. I won't say that this was the cause of their problem. The cause of their problem, the consensus seems to be that she was the one that made the mistakes. She didn't get used to using the radio equipment they had. And it was rudimentary at that time. You know, this is 1937. She just didn't get used to the point where she could use it in an expert manner.

Didn't do her homework.

She didn't do her homework. She was overloaded. She wasn't all that familiar with the airplane, either, but the airplane was an easy one to fly, so she got away with a lot of it. It was just. . . she was. . . today you might say she was an accident looking for a place to happen. It's a harsh thing to say, but it was true.

That whole operation was, wasn't it?

It strictly was public relations thing.

Put together by Putnam, wasn't it?

Yes, that's right. I think she was a pretty nice person, as far as that's concerned, but she was way out of her league.

{CF} What about Wiley Post and Will Rogers?

Well, there's another guy . . . . Of course, Wiley Post comes from Oklahoma. He is buried not too far from your maternal grandmother.

[CF] Over in Oklahoma City.

Well, no, wait a minute. That's an uncle or something. It's your maternal grandmother that's buried in Guthrie. But he had a reputation for being very impatient. He had a good-sized Wright engine in that airplane that they had, and the airplane, by any stretch, was not too airworthy. It had a set of floats on it that the airplane was not designed to carry. They were way too heavy and weak. Just kind of haphazardly. The airplane was extremely nose-heavy. I'm not, it isn't just in my opinion but this is what was an analysis by supposed experts. Anyway, he had a habit of firing his engines up and as soon as it would run halfway smooth, he'd go ahead and take off. He didn't warm them up. And he was in Alaska and it's always cold up there. And they said that he just fired it up, taxied out and took off, and when they were on the climb out, the engine quit. They had a habit of doing that, those big old Wrights. And he went right on in, just like that because he was so low that he just couldn't hold it up.

What did you think about some of the pioneering flights that, say, some of the Brits did, like the Mollisons?

Well, I imagine they did their homework and they overcame a lot of problems, but they persisted. I'd say they did everything right at the time, because they got away with it. Lindbergh did the most daring of the whole bunch. I mean, he's got to have really had his neck hung out a long, long way. I was on Roosevelt Field many times, not during the time that he was there, but afterwards, and there was no hardstand or anything. It was a soft field. He was lucky to get that thing off, because it had rained for about two days before he made that trip.

And he was awfully heavy.

He was way, way overweight. And all these things, just like this round-the-world flight nonstop, that airplane was so dangerous it took an absolutely expert pilot on that airplane to get away with it. And that even required a lot of luck. It was a hell of a feat that they pulled off, and, I mean, they were just damn lucky. And the same old deal. They persisted. They ran into a lot of problems on that flight, but they had a lot of help. They were in contact, radio contact, with the base all the time. It was a tough flight. I mean, tough! If this guy hadn't have been an extremely strong person, I don't think he would have made it. She was, she contributed every bit of her share to it also.

When they got the man-powered airplane up, how about that?

Well, that was strictly experimental stuff. You mean the bicycle thing?

Yes.

They were doing an experiment and they succeeded with it. Also, perseverance. I think they proved something. I don't think it was just a stunt. It was strictly research as far as they were concerned.

Of course he was also a bit on the squirrelly side. Fascinating man, if you ever talked to him.

People who do that are.

[CF] Was he a China Laker?

No, but he was a friend of a couple of China Lakers, and he came up and talked at Engineers' Day a couple of times, so I had a couple of interviews with him.

It takes guys like that to accomplish things. There's a lot of things that happened over the years that, if you stop and analyze the guys that did it, they aren't really people that you would say were stable. They are obsessed with something and they just follow it through.

He said he had flown a lot of rubberband-powered aircraft and he was driving across country with his kids in the back seat and was trying to maintain his sanity as he was driving across Nebraska or Kansas or something and got to wondering if with the newer materials, the wonderful new materials that you have now, if you couldn't scale up the same kind of thing.

And he proved that it could be done.

Yes.

[CF] It had a lovely name, but I can't remember it - like the Zephyr or. . .

Gossamer Condor.

I was just wondering if you would recognize this guy when you see him. I'm really not sure which package it's in, but I'll look at all of them. He was a famous race pilot, or, I should say, a famous pilot who had lots of records to his name.

[CF] Like speed records or cross-country records or. . . ?

Cross-country records, that stuff.

Like Turner?

No, Turner wasn't in the same class with this guy. If you don't recognize him, I'll tell you his name, but I want you to see it first.

[CF] Well, while you're looking for that, I've got a question I'll just sort of spin on. I took Bob out to Murray Field and showed him the vastness of Murray Field, and then we went out to what is the so-called Arcata-McKinleyville airport, and, well, he got a pretty good idea - we didn't go out to Kneeland. We went out to the Samoa airfield, so he got a pretty good idea of what aviation might be like in this area. I was going to sort of ask him for a cross-question, how come Tulsa seems to be right in the center of everything, besides its geographic. . . ?

It's always been a very active aviation center.

[CF] How come?

Oil companies.

[CF] Is that it?

Yes. We probably at one time had more executive airplanes there, this was during the oil boom, than most anywhere else around the country, for our size place. But now there are not that many. There are quite a few there, but Tulsa's always been very active aviation-wise.

At one time in the very early days of flight, the majority of pilot's licenses were owned by people from California and from the Oklahoma area.

Yes.

Probably some of that might be that you had two or three very strong-minded people there that got hooked early on.

[CF] Will Rogers and Wiley Post were really Oklahomans.

You know, I think, I'm afraid I might have lost that picture. I hope not, because it's the only picture I have, and this guy was a very famous pilot. Also bit the dust in the strangest way, too. Let me see if I can find it and I'll tell you the rest of the story.

[JS] How about Frank Hawks?

That's the guy!

[JS] Did I hit it?

You win the prize! I just told you too much about him. I had a picture of him. He flew some of the fastest, most advanced airplanes of his day. This was one of the last B-24s built in Tulsa, and he and I flew it. This guy had a three-number pilot's license. And one of the nicest guys you'd ever want to meet. He's the guy that, when the check pilot said that nobody was going to give this guy any instructions but me, he said, the hell with him! That's not right, so he did, and he did a good job. And the last. . . he's dead now. He died about, he was about 74, 75 years old, and the last flight he made was with me on

Learjet. It tickled him to death, and it did me, too, because I really liked the guy. He was a friend when I really, really needed one. I didn't ask him anything. He offered it.

[CF] How come there's a real brotherhood of airmen?

I don't know. It's just. . . now, that's not universal. There are very many friendships like that, lots of them, but there are also the other kind, too, because not everybody is as nice as some of the other guys are. Now, this QB organization that I am in is pretty . . . . I've lost that picture. Here's a picture of Tulsa from 25,000 feet in 1960, I think.

[CF] Is that the old airport?

Yes. It's the present airport, but the runway now goes down to here and way out to here. This runway is gone. American's got three or four big hangars. This is American's overhaul base here.

[CF] Bob used to be able to fly home and fly over where my mother lives on the hill and let her know that he was an hour away.

I'd just kind of sneak up on it and I'd run the props up and she'd know I was home and put on the steaks. It was a nice airplane.

Well, the lady in this thing is an aunt of mine. When I got ready to go to high school, it was 1930. And you know what 1930 was like. I didn't even have a good pair of shoes to wear or a pair of pants to wear even. She got a suit from her husband, an uncle, and cut it down to fit me and outfitted the rest just so I could go to school. I never did forget her. She was 99 years old when she died, just a year or so ago. But when she got older and her husband died and she was in not too good financial shape, I made sure that she had what she needed.

[CF] How many different airplanes do you think you've flown, different types, different models, different . . . ?

I would have to stop and enumerate them. If you want to count them. . .

Well, I soloed in a Kittyhawk. I don't think you've ever heard of a Kittyhawk. It was an airplane that was built in New England. It was a three-place open biplane. It had a 100-horse Kinner on it. It wasn't a bad airplane. It was a pretty good little training airplane. And I also, during the instruction, I had a few hours in a Waco-10. This right here. And I had my first forced landing in that.

Hey, here's Frank Hawks right here! This is Frank Hawks. This was my instructor. I took this picture. He was flying a Cub that day. He lived in Redding, Connecticut and this was in Bristol, Connecticut, and he had been in Hartford. Do you remember Time Flies, the airplane that he used to fly? He kept it in Hartford at the Pratt and Whitney factory, and he used to fly this little Cub back and forth to his place. It was about

75 miles west of there, and he was flying right across, he would fly right across our airport and we'd see him every little bit. We figured it was him because it was his airplane. One day he just stopped to say hello. He was kind of a nice guy. Of course, we didn't know him very well.

[CF] Tell me how Hawks died.

He was flying test on a small, supposedly everyman's airplane. He crashed and burned one day, and that was all there was to it. They don't . . . I don't recall exactly what the thing was.

[JS] It was the Gwinn Aircar.

Right!

[CF] So it wasn't high performance.

That's why I say it was a strange deal. Here he flies all these high performance experimental stuff and everything else.

[CF] Well, I've got two airplanes that you've flown.

I can tell you another deal, a strange happening. A good friend of mine, his name was Johnny Bouteller, I'd known him for years. He was in between jobs. It was during the time when I was early on on the jet programs, and the company he worked for sold their airplane, so he was out of work. He wanted a Learjet rating, and it's pretty expensive to buy time on that kind of airplane because they burn a lot of fuel and people just don't give the time away. Anyway, right about that time, this copilot I had had been fooling around with his kid and fractured a vertebrae in the back of his neck and he was off for 30 days. So I called on John and asked him if he was interested in flying with me for 30 days, and he says, hell, yes! We were supposed to pay him, let's see, $100 a day and expenses or something like that. Well, he started flying with me and we were flying an awful lot right then. Damn near every day. Every time I got a chance, I'd give him a little chance to fly the airplane to get used to it. I finally came up with this idea. He kept saying he wanted to get a rating and so forth, so I came up with the idea and I talked to the boss about it and I told him, I said, now, John needs a rating in this thing, and we're going to be flying for 30 days and we've been talking about possibly we would trade him a rating including a flight test for him to fly with us for 30 days. We'll pay the expenses, but no wages. He would have earned roughly $3,000 for that month, but if you try to lease a Learjet just for the flight test, it would have cost him that and more. Well, I just told the boss that he was a nice guy and an old friend of mine and that he was doing a hell of a job and he was right here when we needed him, and how about it? And he said, O. K., go for it. So we did. John ended up with a rating and the next week he got a job. But he had been a B-17 pilot. He went all through the war and never got a scratch. He, after, I guess he's been gone

about three or four years now, he fooled around with these antique airplanes. He did just fine. He'd rebuild it. He'd buy a wreck and then rebuild it. And he sold one and he was going to visit his son who was a doctor out here in California somewhere. He ran like hell to catch the airline to come out here to see him, and he and his son and grandchildren were off riding bicycles. There was some stray dog that came out and jumped on him and distracted him to where he ran into one of these grates. He fell, and it threw him off the bicycle and he hit his head on the curb and it killed him. Can you believe that?

[CF] After all the dangerous flying!

You can never tell.

[CF] O. K., back to your airplanes. I've got two, the Kittyhawk and a Waco.

A Waco-10. A straight-wing Waco, which is a later model of that. It had a radial engine rather than the OX-5. I used to barnstorm that thing. The KR-34. I have pictures of it here. T-Craft.

[JS] - Taylor, maybe?

Three different models of it.

[CF] Five, six, seven.

Aeronca. I took my private pilot's license in a little Aeronca. I don't know if you know what an Aeronca is. One of those little bathtub things. Two different models of it.

[CF] Eight. . . nine.

Later models of it. I'm just kind of taking it as it goes along. A KR-21, which is a little taper-wing airplane, the same line as this KR-34 was that I showed you there. id I tell you the KR-34? The -21 and the -34 both. Just two of them.

Let's see, the SM8-4 Stinson. I used to fly it, passengers on a Sunday. We'd give them about a five-minute ride for a buck.

[CF] This is like asking me how many cars you've driven.

Then this is about the time the war came along and I came out here to Oklahoma and flew PT-19s. I left that program and went to Douglas. I flew a B-24, A-24, A-26, and DC-3. P-61. Let's see, that took us to the end of the war. Of course, we had those five B-17s, but I'd only call them as one type. B-25s. A Fairchild-45. Have you ever heard of that? This was a four- or five-place low wing airplane with about a 400-horse engine on it. I only flew one of them. There was also a Curtiss observation type airplane. It had a 600-horse engine on it. The lousiest airplane I ever flew. I only flew one of those. I was damn glad to get out of it. It was like flying a rock. Of course, the PT-17 Stearmans. Stagger Beech. Two different models of it. I flew one of the originals with a fixed gear, and then later, the retractable gear. That was a nice airplane. Twin Cessna. Two different models, a T-50 and the 310. A 421 Cessna. That's another type. A Ventura. Let's see, and two

different models of Learjets. Oh, in between there, there was a Lockheed Jet Star. Not much, but I flew it. Let's see. . . N-3N, which was a Navy trainer. A Fleet. That was another small airplane. I think that's about the limit. Did I give you DC-3?

I've flown a lot of the A-26s. We put out 1400 of them at that time. We flew them about a year, and I'll bet I flew 800 of them.

[CF] Well, I do this crazy thing when I'm driving on the freeway. I try to go to sleep when I'm driving 60 miles an hour. Do pilots go to sleep when they're flying 120 knots?

What do you mean, 120?

[CF] Well, maybe a little more.

The Lear was a 450-knot.

[CF] Did your. . . ?

One time, I'll tell you, this little fat boy that was my partner, the one who always thought he was such a hotshot pilot, he never had a license, but he thought he . . . You know, it was simple. Anybody could do it. We were going to Florida to pick up, well, we had bought an A-26 down there without engines on it. This was for a company in Pittsburgh, and we had to. . . . We'd bought the airplane and we also bought the engine packages. They come in packages. You had them all boxed up and everything. Cowl and the motor mount and the whole works. You just take them out of the box and hang them on the airplane. We had been doing a hell of a lot of flying. In fact, the day that this particular thing happened, I had been up at about 4 o'clock in the morning and we had flown off and on all day long, and then we found out about 5 o'clock the next morning that we had so much time to get down there and cinch this deal up on the airplane, so we took off and headed for Florida again. I don't think I'd had two hours sleep in the last 48 hours. Of course, I was 28 years old then. Hell, I could do anything! But this guy was flying as my copilot, and, of course, I didn't really have to have a copilot on a DC-3. They were a very simple airplane to fly. Real reliable, nice machine. Anyway, I just had to get some sleep. That's all there was to it. He had been home sleeping part of the time while I'd been out working. And we started off for Florida, and, of course, that airplane is not the fastest airplane in the world. We had an autopilot on and we'd fly along and, boy, I was getting really sleepy. I finally said, damn it! You just watch this thing for a while. I'm going to get a little sleep. It was about 4 o'clock in the morning. I promptly feel asleep. And I woke up about two hours later. We were going over Tallahassee, Florida. I looked over and here's the guy out like a light. We were on autopilot. I just chewed him out. But, of course, at that time, there wasn't that kind of traffic that you have today. You could fly all day long and never see an airplane then. Coming back from there, this was at night. By the time we got the deal done and headed back for home, it was night. We had a lot of head wind. It was late in the year and we'd get a lot of these northwest winds. Some of them are pretty damn fierce. Anyway, we weren't making very much headway. I was still pretty pooped because I'd been busy all day long. He kept saying, oh, I can fly it. I'll be all right.

We came by Little Rock and it was still an hour to get home. I just couldn't keep my eyes open any longer. I said, you hold this course! Well, the normal course without winds would probably be 290 or something like that, but we had a hell of a crosswind out of the southwest. I was compensating about 25 degrees. We were flying up like so. He kept trying to pull 290 all the time. I said, damn it! I said 275 and I mean to stay there. So I just kind of clocked off a little bit and pretty soon he was sitting there and he wanted to hand-fly the thing. He was sitting there whistling, you know, and fly along there, and I finally dozed off for a little bit, maybe 30 minutes or so, and I woke up and looked around and said, where the hell are we, anyway? He said, oh, Muskogee's right up here. So I ran a couple of checks on the ADF and that wasn't Muskogee. He had gone back to his 290 again. We were up near Joplin, Missouri.

[CF] A little off-course there! Well, what's your worst airport and your best airport?

Well, there are two worst airports. One is up in Colorado. It's right down in the mountains. I mean, there's about a 12-5, and this is a 6500-foot airport. You take off a 6500-foot airport and it's like taking off at cruise power. You just don't get all the power out of it. A Learjet goes out of there like nothing. You don't even notice it. But any of the normally aspirated airplanes, I mean, they have a hell of a time getting off. I mean, you've got to have everything going right or you just don't get off. It's northwest . . . you land southeast and you take off northwest because there's a big mountain right here. The other one is - not Hot Springs, Virginia, but it's right on top of a mountain up there. Johnson and Johnson Company lost a G-2, that's a $15 million airplane, with eight or 10 people off of that airport. It was their own stupidity that did it. I mean, they, this thing, of course, it's almost 7500 feet to start with. It's long enough under normal conditions, but they were socked in. They were practically zero-zero at that airport because of the cloud layer. They made three or four passes at it, instrument approaches, and on the last one, the end toward the instrument landing system went down 700 feet just as straight as that. It's just a rock face. And they hit about 300 feet down on that thing. It just made a black spot on that thing. A $15 million airplane and then eight or 10 people. But it was one time when persistence did not pay. I understand they were not easy people to fly for. I mean, they didn't take no for an answer. I would not fly for people like that at all.

[CF] Well, the two worst airports.

Tulsa's got a very nice airport. And they keep it up. They get all the new stuff and, really, it was one of my favorite airports. Each airport's a little bit different. It's hard to say what would be, what might be best for me is not the best for someone else. But. . .

I've seen reports that O'Hare is bad and that LAX is bad.

O'Hare is bad for traffic. There's nothing wrong with the airport. And the operators up there, the tower operators, are the best in the business. Absolutely the best! They're better than the New York operators. In instrument conditions, they can land an airline, they line them up to where they hit the airport 60 seconds apart. They have to hit the right intersection and get off it. They've got high speed turnoffs. Thirty seconds later, another one.

[CF] How about San Diego ?

It's not the best.

I've heard some bad reports on Lindbergh Field.

It's too close in. Usually in northwest in Lindbergh, you can see people in windows of buildings on final approach.

[CF] We used to go get drinks on one of these skyscrapers and watch these guys going right by level.

How about Metro in Washington? There's another one that's a little bit too close in.

The approach to that thing is horrible. Instrument approach, you approach north and you're all right, but if you've got to land south, the airport is here and the capitol is here. You've got to come in like this and make a steep turn going like that. And it's not good. I'd a lot rather go into Dulles. Dulles is way out in the country and it's a straight in deal.

[CF] We're approaching the end of the tape, so, Bob Dieter, I wish you happy landings and thanks for sharing with us.

Fascinating!

I don't have to have any worry about landings any more. I'm the world's worst airline passenger. I know what's supposed to be going on in the front end of this thing, and if it isn't happening on time, I'm just. . . . I know they're all right. Ninety percent of these guys are first class. But there are a bunch of screw-ups in it, too. I hired a copilot one time who is now flying for one of the airlines, and if I ever got on an airplane and I heard that he was the captain, I would get off. He was that bad.

Well, this has been an absolutely riveting afternoon.

Well, I hope I was able to help you with this. You know, you can't get in this business for 50 years without running into all kinds of things. And, like I told you people, I soloed 60 years ago last month. I was 18 years old. 1935.

[CF] Well, to show you the perspective, I've tracked down for you, Mickey, a guy who's 93 who goes to the Fortuna senior lunch site who says he saw one of the Wright brothers flights.

That would be nice.

That would be great.

[CF] If you get him, you'd have 60 years. I mean, the perspective of flight in this century is incredible!

People do not really realize how much progress has been made. It's amazing that as crude as that airplane was that they did . . . . I mean, those guys did a very major discovery on that thing, and persistence paid for them. I don't think they really get all the recognition that they should have.

My opinion is that business flying should survive very well in the future because it performs a needed service. Airlines are very crowded now and unless you are traveling first class, are somewhat uncomfortable. In business flying you go when you want and where you want to, direct, not to some other place first because that's where the airline goes. A lot of companies hold conferences while en route. It is a much more relaxed mode of travel. Not all companies need a large plane. The average size plane would probably carry seven to 16 passengers. Not all would be jets. Jets are great but quite expensive. There is a wide selection of planes which could serve nicely for many companies, which are quite affordable.

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